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A Psychiatrist Surveys the Mind and the Wider World

by [Dr. Nassir Ghaemi](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/bloggers/dr-nassir-ghaemi)



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The politics of radical empathy

Thoughts on Iran

Poor Mexico, the saying goes:  So far from God, and so close to the United States. Iran, one is tempted to say, suffers from the opposite problem, producing the same result: Perhaps it is too close to God (some would say too [religious](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/religion)) and too far from the United States (some would say too ignored by the US now where it had been too controlled by it before). But even that is not exactly right: Obama is correct in keeping his distance now; the US would only complicate matters. And perhaps more distance from religion is not the solution either; as Gandhi once said, those who say religion and the state should be separate do not understand the nature of religion.

Political conflict is rarely simple. If any one party wins completely, all lose. If all parties are to win, none can win completely. Gandhi and King struggled with this quandary. Today nonviolence is too often seen as a tactic to avoid harm by a stronger enemy; Gandhi and King saw it as a [moral](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/morality) principle - the willingness to suffer even more by resisting without fighting than by fighting back, so as to convince, rather than defeat, one's enemy.

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The psychological concept that became the core of the politics of Gandhi and King was empathy, love in simpler language.  A simple idea, endorsed by all, engaged by few.

*Truth-force*, Gandhi called it; a better word than nonviolence, since there is force indeed, but not physical force, nor even [spiritual](http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/spirituality) force, but rather the force of what is true, beginning with the most basic truth of all - so well stated by that Persian poet Saadi - that the sons of Adam are members of one body; where any part hurts, it all hurts.

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